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PIGEONS OF ST. MARK'S

By

LOUISE EDGAR PETERS



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FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR

This little book is an attempt to put into words what I see as the solution of the problem of religion and religious knowledge, especially in its relation to science and scientific knowledge. Those who understand something of the laws of the subconscious and the nature and function of poetry will know why I have been obliged to express this solution in verse.

LOUISE EDGAR PETERS

PIGEONS OF ST. MARK'S

UP, up from the great throbbing city's life
You rise and soar.
None of its sharp, uncouth, self-centered strife,
Nor senseless roar
Can reach you as self-poised you float in higher
rhythmic law.

Steady and calm you hold the place you've won
By upward surge.
Swinging and iridescent, charms us on
Your flight's swift urge.
Contagion supersensuous! Our divinities, unique,
emerge

And soar as you have soared in vision rapt,
Articulate,
Only to fall. Alas! To fly not apt.
Our heaven gate
Leads by slow steps and long laborious wait

With faces altar turned—but now no more
In fear or gloom.
We failed to grasp thy birds, O Truth, yet tore
Some feathers. Bloom
Celestial! Omen of our dear transcendent doom.

THE GOOD SHIP PARADISE

THE ocean lies with open arms,
The ocean knows and waits.
The chattering streams like homing flocks
Trip through her silent gates.
For the tide draws out with compelling force
In their dark unconscious deeps,
Though the fickle wind like a wayward sprite
Its vain resistance keeps.
So it's On waters, Out waters,
Back to your mother's breast:
For it's drop to drop and it's heart to heart
And it's birdlings to their nest.

A stately squadron of tall ships
Is headed for the sea:
But some are caught in the brush on shore
And some are sailing free,
And some have chosen to anchor where
The water is sweet and cool,
And the tide has gone and left them shut
In a tiny, lifeless pool.
For there's on ships and halt ships
And there's caught in the land sprung snares;

But it's sail, if you sail, with the pilot moon
Or it's dry dock for repairs.

One quaint ship called the Paradise
Is keeping near the wind.
She forges forth in the van alone
While the sluggards lag behind.
Her sailors are young and keen and bold,
Her helmsman steers her true
And her orders come by wireless straight
To the captain and the crew.

So it's Hey, sailors! Ho, sailors!
Steer for the open sea.
You've a stout old hulk of sufficient bulk,
And her rudder's swinging free.

The Admiral sits at his desk, on board
The flag ship far ahead.
He speaks to his men and they hear him call,
Save those who are deaf or dead,
And those who are lost in the fog of doubt
Where illusive voices lure,
But the helmsman who knows his Master's voice
Holds his rudder firm and sure.

So it's Hark, helmsmen! List, helmsmen!
Don't you hear your Master call?
Then steer to the sound of Heaven's Hound
Be it schooner, yacht or yawl.

BEHIND THE ALTAR

WE'VE built a home for you behind the altar,
Will you not come and dwell with us O Lord?
If you do not like our house we shall not falter;
We will wreck it at your pleasure
And rebuild it to your measure
From its cellar to its summit board on board.

But we heard you left directions how to build it
And we've followed them, if so we understood.
We've dug a cellar deep in truth and filled it
With the furnace of man's love
That warms all the rooms above,
And we've made the frame of planks of service-
wood,—

Then one upon another laid our duties
In a ladder-stairway climbing round on round.
And we've packed the rooms with all art's praying
beauties
That hang or stand or swing
So that every lovely thing
That speaks to man of God may there be found.

We cut the windows facing each direction
That we might hear the truth that all men say
And learn the law of your sublime perfection
Which unites in East and West
And in North and South what's best,
As all colors blend to make the light of day.

And at the very top we built an attic
With a sliding window open to the sky,
An arrangement of our own and symptomatic
Of our still, subconscious pleading
For some clear, convincing leading,
Straight and steady as the birds see when they fly.

Now can you think, O Christ, this home is fitted
To house your spirit, lofty and divine?
Or do you find some vital thing omitted?
In your most heavenly grace
O let us see your face,
That hides beneath the bread and in the wine.

MY DREAM

I HAD a dream. I dreamed I stood
On the smooth verge of a steep precipice.
Behind—a wood, enticing fair,
Beneath—a gulf of great abysmal space.
I could not to the wood, Alas!
I knew too well the horrors therein hid.
That yawning gulf I knew not yet,
And fain would fling myself into its depths
If there I might find peace or death.
O Peace! O Death! Are ye then so far off
Or sleeping now or deaf or cruel
That ye come not when I do call you so?
O Power that ever urgest me on,
Why may I not forever clinging here
Escape from worse? Why must I on
To unknown woe and fiercer strife?
Is there no end to sin or pain or time?
O dull and blinded mortal eyes
That seeing see not clearly nor perceive!
O hard and crooked mortal hearts
That in your pride ye will not understand!
O hope of all most undeserved!

E'en as I cried for help the help was near.
Behold an isle most glorious, fair and lovely
With a beauty far beyond aught I had dreamed
of or desired.

And in the peace and glory of that isle
There walked all spirits beautified and clean,
In whom no guile was found nor sin,
Through Jesus Christ and his pure blood.
And blindness, blindness, most incarnate blind,
To be so near and not to see.
O ever looking down how could I think
To find a rest or peace or love
To fill my soul? I'll hie me to that isle
And not stand here forever lone
Because I lack the courage or the will.

And there I woke. But still that isle
Shines clearly in my vision up above.
And when I look upon its light
A great peace fills my soul and a great love.
So ever looking upward now
I'll keep this goal in view until the time
When I shall join those spirits that I saw.

THE BIRTH OF THE SOUL

A MAN I knew who had seen God;
He made me see him too.
A man I knew who walked where angels trod;
With him I walked there too.
A man I knew to whom Christ spoke; our Lord
Spoke to me too.
And when he went away they died;
And I died too.

Dull, deep emptiness. Dim despair.
A weight as of a world in chains,
Manacled and prisoned. Death
Half conscious of itself. Inane futility.
Infinite incompetence, and fear
Of slipping further in this slough
Of creeping, crawling thoughts. Shuddering
I cried, "O God! So be it."

Clarion like the call! I stirred and turned
Once in those mighty arms
Where all unknowing I had lain,
Bathed in a sea of peace.
The radiant morning glow

Of the new day lighted my will.
I raised my head
And looked straight in God's eyes.
Then, laughing, rose and spread my wings
And leaped into the air.
"Wake man," I cried, "God smiles."

TO CAPITAL

I SAW a mountain lion behind bars,
Small bodied, lithe. Chin high he stood and
scorned,

Not knowing his disgrace,
Or drowsed with head on paw.

I turned toward home and strolled through groves
and fields.

Five deer were straying in a meadow green
Nibbling the grass. Kind eyed
And beautiful they were.

“These five and thirty more a lion needs
Each year to keep alive,” a woodsman said.

“He does not need so much
But likes fresh food.

“The government values the deer and thinks
The lion's cost too high. A hunter roams
The mountains, paid to kill
The whole infesting breed.”

“But could the lions not be tamed,” I asked,
“And taught to eat green food like other beasts?”
“I fear me not,” he said.
“For me,” I said, “I hope.”

TO LABOR

WE are disappointed in you, brothers.
You had your chance.
You are no better than those others
In your blind trance.

Our nation's future hope is in the middle—
Sane men between;
The solution of our social riddle—
Mind, not spleen.

For what we need is thinking men not grafters—
Men of good will.
Strong houses are not built on rotten rafters.
Sam pays the bill.

Your intermittent fights which keep us quaking
Are too high priced.
A social mind quite new is in the making—
The mind of Christ.

SONGS OF THE UNCHURCHED

SONG OF THE UNEMPLOYED

WE were outcasts and you brought us home,
Not aliens but friends to your hearth.
Weeds, you planted us in the rich loam
Of St. Mark's Garth.
Love warmed, faith watered, fast we grew
Under the gardener's pruning hand,
Propped in our weakness till he knew
That we could stand.

So it's out and away in the morning gray,
There's work and a home for the best of us.
In the dawn of hope we will climb life's slope—
There are gardens still for the rest of us.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Outcasts and we brought you home? Those were
our Master's orders.
So shall he hear us when we call.
We would be a fertile, watered garden in whose
borders
The waters never fall. (*Isaiah 58.*)

SONG OF THE BUSINESS MEN

THIS world is ours. We know no other.
Ours is today.

We are the keepers of our brother
Be who he may.

We see that poets starve without us,
That artists fail.

We see them dying all about us.
Of what avail?

If life must have two wings to fly by,
Let us be one.
Enough if we have priests to die by
When life is done.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Already you are one wing — you point in one
direction—
And steady birds need two.
Art is life's light and crown. Seize and act on this
reflection
If you would journey true.

SONG OF THE INTELLECTUALS

YOU unchurched us when you were untrue to
truth.

We stand for the mind of man.

Science has proved what is our due to truth

Since scholarship began.

Man's mind has done so much, can still do more.

We stand for the open door.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Truth—yes, but what is truth? Your professors
can not find it

In their academic youth.

Their logics end in contradiction;

Their explanations jump affliction.

Life is our teacher and in the silences behind it

We hear the voice of truth.

SONG OF THE HEATHEN

YOU thought God had forgotten us
And left us out in the cold.
You thought Christ was your shepherd,
And we were not of his fold.

If you'll face our great religions
With clear, unbiased view
You'll say, "One flock, one shepherd
For the heathen have got it too."

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Other sheep He has who are not of this fold—
Them also will He bring.
There shall be one fold and one shepherd.

SONG OF THE ACTORS

YOU came not to our church;
We would not go to yours.
We did not like your church;
You did not know of ours.
And so you judged us hardly,
Not knowing our intent,
And we too judged you hardly
For what we thought you meant.

We speak of life as it is, you know,
And life is realistic.
If you say we're fast, why we think you're slow
And unduly optimistic.
But we're all athirst for the truth to show
What we mean by realistic.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

You mean by realistic not the shifting beads of fact;
Rather the cord which makes the chain.
True plays are bound together scene by scene and
act by act:
Many carriages—one train.

SONG OF THE PAINTERS

IN the folds of his garment we glimpsed Him in its shimmer of sunlight and shade, Evanescing, retreating, illusive like the whisper of secrets half heard, Earth-clad and girdled with waters, tiared in the eyes of a maid, And warbling with gladness transcendent in the full-throated joy of a bird.

But the pastors and priests were against us. They wanted a portrait more clear.

They said it was sacrilege utter to speak of the clothing of God.

They tried to portray and describe Him in the language of logic and fear—

A garment, though strait and confining, as impoverished souls can afford.

But to you who have learned of the richness and manifold meaning of life

We offer our whispering Godhead, the far reaching truth of the soul.

Let partitioning mental professors go on with discussion and strife;

We cling to our whispers and glimpses, as fragments
which point to a whole.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

To compile the Book of Life God needs just such
recorders—
Men who can hear his faintest call.
You will be a fertile, watered garden in whose
borders
The waters never fall.

SONG OF THE SCULPTORS

WE have wrestled with the granite, we have
chiseled, we have hewed,
We have thought great thoughts and uttered them
in stone,
We have heard God's giant little voice, his marble
vision viewed
And we've caught the captive spirit's answering
moan.

But as yet we have not freed her from her dungeon
in the rock,
We must nobly live if nobly we'd create,
And our shepherds who should help us say we are
not of their flock—
That our vision is but scrawlings on a slate.

We were strangers and you welcomed us, you spoke
our language too,
Our vernacular we knew you'd understand:
For the captive we had visioned had showed herself
to you,
So we give ourselves to God in your command.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Not strangers, brothers-in-arms, let the Ideal lead
us forward
To the Lake of No More Thirst.
Till the ripples which run from the troubled centre
shoreward
In that centre are immersed.

SONG OF THE MUSICIANS

IF you've sensed the still sea lapping
On a smooth beach,
If you've heard white gull wings flapping
Just out of reach,
If you've felt musicians playing
Behind the notes
And known they were really praying
With wordless throats,
You will know what we mean by saying
That music is God's prayer-speech.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Art is God's vernacular and beauty bears His
orders.
Aspiration is our call.
We can be a fertile, watered garden in whose borders
The waters never fall.

SONG OF THE POETS

DEEP within a mountain fastness,
Where no man has trod,
Lies a lake, enclosed in vastness,
Like a thought of God.
From its bosom clear, pellucid,
Flows a mighty stream;
Sings in rhythms flaming, lucid,
God's procreant dream.

"Roaring, surging, leaping, swirling,
Bursting into foam,
Over flat rock surface whirling
To my valley home;
Bounding over boulders massive
Into olive pools,
Falling chasms down, impassive,
Shattering all rules.

Waterfall of inspiration
From the mountain crest,
Dealing death, source of creation,
Earth-food from God's breast,
Heaven sent, Oh valley dwellers,
Spurn me and you die.

Spirits poisoned by best-sellers
Unto heaven cry.

Drive your mills by eagle power,
Eagles lose their wings;
Whitest cleanest meadow flour
Sullies mountain springs.
As you've failed to see my banner
So you've strayed unled;
As you've scorned celestial manna
So you've starved unfed."

Lo! the flood from heaven falling
Bringing heaven down,
Beckoning, pleading, coaxing, calling
To the valley town.
"Scale the cliffs of intuition;
Purge the mountain stream.
Cast the shackles of tradition.
Dare to dream God's dream."

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

We are strangers, will you bring us home. Those
are your Master's orders.
So shall He hear you when you call.
You will be a fertile, watered garden in whose bor-
ders
The waters never fall.

SONG OF THE BLESSED DEAD

WE'VE been knocking at your doors
Many years.
In your little narrow rooms, from the floors
You have scarcely raised your eyes for a peep out
 at the skies,
 Blurred by tears.

Raise your latches, lift your eyes,
 And anon
Smiles shall take the place of sighs.
Put your lamps out. Let the Night lead you with her
 lanterns bright
 Out and on.

RESPONSE BY THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH

Dead and alive let each his God inspired message
 give;
We bind them in one sheaf.
So shall we save that wheat of truth by which all
 spirits live—
The fruit within the leaf.

CLIPPINGS FROM THE GARTH OF
ST. MARK'S

THE GARTH

A TANGLE of quaint flowers borders the street
And the straight centre path—soft-scented, rare
Or strong with pungent odors. Maiden-hair
And crocuses and phlox and bitter-sweet,
The children of all climes and seasons meet
And interchange their fragrance in the air.
As from a broidered cushion soars a prayer,
So stands a row of poplars with their feet
Slippered in nosegays and their steepled tops
Speaking to heaven. Strong and lean and straight—
The spirit's pioneers and virtue's props—
They mark the path from the walled entrance gate
To the clear fountain where the great dog roams
And, growling, drives the weaklings to their homes.

THE GARDEN WALL

THE garden wall is made by those outside
Who dignify themselves by building jails
Where they may dwell select. So man entails
His genius to the uses of his pride.
To such the fruits of genius are denied.
E'en so those bricks of prejudice are frail
Protection to caste-weaklings, but avail
To fence this bower from the floricide.

Let stand the wall and may he pass who can.
Soft vines about it climb and droop. The gate
Is open wide for all who humbly wait
And sweetly, patiently seek entrance there.
Garlanded graciousness courts every man.
Life's rambling roads approach from everywhere.

PURPLE IRIS

SHE stands a purple iris in the green
Of high traditions. Little deeds of grace
Stream past her either way, and o'er her face
Is spread the ripening summer's mellow sheen—
The prismaed aureole of what has been:
Perennial flora of a noble race!
In heaven's seedling plot she has her place:
God's babe she is who might have been man's queen.
Patrician dignity in service meek
That overturns the world, makes high things low,
Low high! So first and last each other seek.
In dirt and dung all radiant flowers grow.
If Earth to crown her travail Heaven needs,
Heaven needs our Earth to bear his little seeds.

BITTER-SWEET

HIGH nested in the tree-tops, where on wings
Of many birds your throbbing maiden song
Leaps wordless to the sky! O artist strong
And masterful, such fate-enraptured strings
Are wont to tear their hearts out. Ocean flings
Its treasures wildly on the sand along
A firmly beaten beach: each wave, a prong
Of Neptune's trident, cosmic purpose sings.
So lady of the tree-tops, bitter-sweet,
Strong-frail, cool-passionate, proud-meek, you are
A necklace of sharp contrasts. Oddly-neat
You cling about the neck of life till far
She thrusts you from her. Then you stand
A rock of fortitude in a green land.

FLOWERING EUCALYPTUS

THOU woman of the untamed pagan heart
And mystic sight, in whom the Jew and Greek
Are bound relentlessly in love, I seek
To know thy secret, thine inspired art.

We see thee fair: thou in thy native part
Of beauty dost reign all supreme, but meek,
Steadfastly good, walled fortress of the weak,

We see thee shame thyself in higher part.
Thy soul is like a precious fabric, wrought
With all the skill of ages that compete
For prize of perfectness—I have seen naught

To rival it—a peerless jewel meet
For angels' wonder and men's love, self-taught
To answer those who sit about thy feet.

THE MONTEREY CYPRESS

I AM the indomitable one, supreme
Above disaster. Blow on blow may fall,
I stand erect, head high, eyes clear, and call
On God whose child I am to prove the dream
Of man's divinity. Through me a stream
Whose source is in His heart flows down to all
Who will receive it. Let Him pour out gall,
I'll drain nor hold such fealty extreme.

But O, if you had known that man you'd see
The love I bore him could not have been less.
He overpassed all merit, and to me
Embodyed faith triumphant through the stress
Of failing fortunes—so the royal fee
I ask of life is blessing—and to bless.

THE WATERING POT

THE Buddha stops to tea with anecdotes
And songs and boudoir tales. The ladies shout
With glee. The children hold his hands and pout
If others are preferred. The Buddha quotes
From Laotze, from Plotinus and the notes
In Emerson's great Journal. Flowers sprout
In every fertile spirit. Fountains spout.
The sun upon the budding landscape gloats.

Sweet melodies sing in my inner ear.
The voice of God behind the veil of words
Though still and small makes all his meanings clear.
His plan hides in the warbling of young birds.

Buddha and ladies build a world foundation—
Music for all and peace for every nation.

AMERICAN BEAUTY ROSE

THEY tell me she is dead and look for tears,
Or speak of hope with hesitating lips.
My mind rejects their fact; my spirit grips
The life beneath all death and calmly peers
Into the veiled abyss. My sharpened ears,
Intent, hear voices. Broken meanings, quips
And trivial facts converge. Thus science strips
The mask off Death—souls cradled in their biers.

O tallest, fairest, sweetest, reddest rose!
Though just outside our garden wall you grew,
No barrier your fragrance ever knew.
Your heart prevailed all gardens to enclose.
So stay with us and still your fragrance shed.
We'll sense your presence, sweeter being dead.



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